

THE GULL



GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER VOL. 88 NO. 2 FEBRUARY 2003

FOUNDED 1917

Alameda National Wildlife Refuge Threatened

by Arthur Feinstein

Eight years after the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requested the transfer of a part of the closing Alameda Naval Air Station for the purpose of creating the Alameda National Wildlife Refuge, the USFWS is now considering abandoning the Refuge.

In 1994, USFWS officially requested from the U.S. Navy that 565 acres of land and 390 acres of Bay waters be transferred from the closing Alameda Naval Air Station to USFWS for the purpose of creating the Alameda National Wildlife Refuge.

This transfer has been delayed for eight years by the presence of contaminants on parts of the proposed Refuge site. Now the Navy has found a way to get out from under its responsibility for cleaning up these contaminants. With no public notice, a "rider" (a last-minute attachment to a federal legislative bill) was added to the 2002 Defense Appropriation bill and was passed and signed into law. This rider — HR 4546 — allows the Secretary of the Navy or any military department to transfer "surplus" military land to a nonprofit organization for the purposes of natural resource conservation and management. Once the transfer has taken place, however, the new owner can purchase the land at market rate and use it for any purpose whatsoever, including development—regardless of the natural resources found on the land.

This is what is proposed for Alameda. We believe that even before this bill was passed, the Navy was in negotiation with a nonprofit, the Realty Restoration Gift Fund (RRGF), to consider making such a transfer of the proposed Alameda NWR lands. RRGF's mission statement does not mention natural resource management and restoration. Its board evidently consists primarily of individuals with real-estate backgrounds and ties to oil and mining firms. We could find no track record of successful wildlife conservation or endangered species management projects of any kind.

This proposed transfer raises many questions. The endangered California Least Tern colony located on the proposed Alameda National Wildlife Refuge site requires active management. Will RRGF allow the colony to disappear, then pay market rate for the land and sell it or develop it? If RRGF does indeed want to manage the land as a home for wildlife, does it have the funding or expertise to do so?

The proposed transfer also raises issues of accountability. If it remains federal land, the government must answer to the public if it fails to adequately manage the Least Tern colony. If it is in private hands, there is no obligation for the owner to take or respond to public input and no public recourse if the species approaches extinction. The issue of the contaminants on the site also needs to be addressed.



A USFWS biologist checks a California least tern nest

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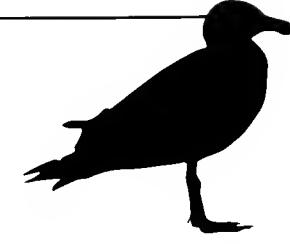
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FIELD TRIPS

Susan Groves



Woodbridge Road Ecological Preserve and Area*

San Joaquin County

Saturday, February 1

Meet at 9 a.m. at the Park 'n Ride lot on the east side of the intersection of I-5 and Hwy. 12, west of Lodi and north of Stockton. The first stop is Lodi Sewer Ponds, then we'll caravan to Woodbridge Road Ecological Area where we should see Sandhill Cranes and Tundra swans. Leader determines the rest of the day on the day of the trip. Bring lunch. Trip ends mid-afternoon or sooner depending upon weather. Beginners welcome. Be prepared for cold. Heavy rain cancels. Fog may make viewing difficult. Leader: Jim Rowoth. 209.952.2648 TLALOC27@aol.com.

south of Los Banos. Trip ends in Paicines, 12.5 miles south of Hollister. Arrive with a full gas tank, lunch and warm clothes. Trip ends about 3 p.m. Rain cancels. Leader: Chris Carpenter. 510.569.9281 day, 510.547.2201 eve.

Strybing Arboretum

San Francisco

Sundays, February 2, March 2

Meet at 8 a.m. at the front gate of the Arboretum (9th Ave. and Lincoln Way) for this regular first Sunday of the month half-day trip. Strybing Arboretum is a delightful section of Golden Gate Park, with several "micro-habitats" attracting a varied array of resident, migrant and vagrant birds. Beginners and all others welcome. GGAS co-leaders: Allan Ridley, Rick Ferrick. Strybing Arboretum Docents: Helen McKenna, Linda Lyons. 415.566.3241.

Panoche Valley*

Sunday, February 2

This trip produces several species of raptors, Mountain Bluebirds, Vesper Sparrows, Phainopeplas, Lewis' Woodpecker and other wintering specialities. Meet at 8 a.m. at the intersection of Interstate 5 and Little Panoche Rd.,

*For carpool coordination, call Susan Groves at 510.654.5954 if you can share a ride or if you need a ride.

[\$] trips go to parks or other sites which require an entrance fee.

If you need information and have difficulty reaching a field trip leader, if you have suggestions for trips, or if you are interested in leading a trip, call Susan Groves, Field Trips Committee Chair.

Birding for Families at Strybing Arboretum

San Francisco

Sundays, February 2, March 2

Meet at the front gate of the Arboretum (9th Avenue and Lincoln Way) for this regular, first Sunday of the month bird and nature hike through the exciting micro-habitats of Strybing Arboretum. From 8:30-10:30 a.m. For ages 7 and older. Bring binoculars, small notebook and pencil. Leaders: Nancy DeStefanis, Scott Walker and Darren Dawson, Strybing Arboretum docent. Sponsored by GGAS, Strybing Arboretum and the Stow Lake Environmental Education Project. 415.876.5220; stowlakeproject@yahoo.com.

Presidio Bird Hike and Quail Watch

San Francisco

Saturday, February 8

We will visit many of the Presidio's diverse birding habitats on foot. We will start at Baker Beach and then check Lobos Dunes, Quail Commons, Presidio Hills, Mountain Lake, Inspiration Point and the Tennessee Hollow Watershed. We will also watch for banded California Quail to collect information for the Presidio's quail monitoring program. We will walk about 3.5 miles round trip. We'll then carpool to Crissy Field for lunch and a check of the marsh. Bring sturdy footwear, fluids, snacks and a lunch. Meet in Baker Beach parking lot at 8:30 a.m. From 25th Ave. turn right onto Lincoln Blvd., then left onto Bowley and right to Baker Beach. Leader: Alan Hopkins. 415.664.0983; ash@sfo.com.

Alameda Creek/Coyote Hills/Quarry Lakes Bicycle Trip

Sunday, February 9

Meet at 9:15 a.m. at the Isherwood Staging Area in Fremont. Approximately 20 miles total, all on bike trail, very little uphill. Over 50 species of birds were seen on this trip last year. We will bicycle a short distance to Quarry Lakes Regional Park and then along the Alameda Creek Regional Trail to Coyote Hills Regional Park, returning to Isherwood mid to late afternoon. Dress for cool, windy weather. Bicycle helmet obligatory. Bring lunch and liquids. Optional Afghani dinner at Salang Pass Restaurant, 37462 Fremont Blvd., after trip. RSVP if you want to go to dinner. Rain cancels. Directions: By car, take I-880 to Fremont and take Alvarado Blvd./Fremont Blvd. Exit. Go east on Fremont Blvd. Turn left onto Pasco Padre Pkwy., turn left onto Isherwood Dr.,

cross the bridge, turn right into the Isherwood Staging Area. From the Peninsula via Dumbarton Bridge, continue east on Hwy. 84 which becomes Decoto Rd. after crossing I-880. One mile past I-880, turn right onto Pasco Padre Pkwy. and follow above directions. AAA Fremont/Union City map recommended. If using BART, call for directions. Leader: Kathy Jarrett. 510.547.1233; kathy_jarrett@yahoo.com.



Quail

Early birders meet Friday morning at 7:30 a.m. on the back side of Morro Rock (facing the harbor). We will then head south, stopping along to bird Oceano Campground, Oso Flaco Lake Natural Area, and the mouth of the Santa Maria River. For Saturday arrivals, we will again meet at 7:30 a.m. on the back side of Morro Rock, spending the day birding the hot spots in and around Morro Bay. Sunday will be dedicated to Carrizo Plain, heading home in the afternoon. Bring lunch; be prepared for cool and possibly wet weather. Call and confirm your place. Rain will not cancel the Morro Bay portion. Heavy rains on Sunday may cancel Carrizo Plain. Leader: Rick Fournier. 831.632.2473, www.montereybirdingadventures.com.

Las Gallinas Sewer Ponds*

Marin

Saturday, February 22

Meet at 9 a.m. at the parking lot for this half-day trip. We'll see water birds, raptors and more. Beginners welcome. Take 101 north and exit at the Lucas Valley Drive off-ramp. Go east on Smith Ranch Rd. to the end. Take a sharp left to the sewage treatment ponds, just before the county park. Drive past the headquarters to the parking lot on left. Leader: Bob Lewis. 510.845.5001; Rlewis0727@aol.com.

Honey Lake and Greater Sage-Grouse

Saturday - Sunday, March 15 - 16

We will search Lassen County for Greater Sage-Grouse, Bald Eagles and other wintering birds of the Eastern Sierra. Trip limited to the first 20 participants who sign up with the leader after January 31. Detailed directions provided to those who are confirmed.

continued on next page

Morro Bay/Carrizo Plain

San Luis Obispo County

Friday - Sunday, February 14 - 16

A weekend of great birding, lodging and restaurants. We will bird throughout San Luis Obispo County, starting on the coast and finishing up on Carrizo Plain.

Lodging available in Susanville; primitive camping available in the Honey Lake State Wildlife Area. Bring warm clothing, lunches for both days, and a scope if you have one. Leader: Dave Quady 510.704.9353; davequady@worldnet.att.net.

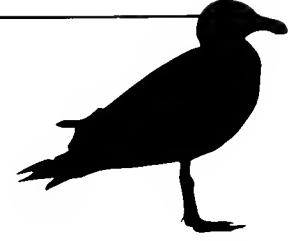
Second GGAS Ohlone Wilderness Backpack Trip^[\$]

Friday - Monday, May 2 - 5

This is a very strenuous 20-mile hike over four days and three campsites. We begin at Sunol Regional Wilderness, alt. 300' and end at Del Valle Regional Park in Livermore, alt. 750', attaining a max. alt. of 3817' at Rose Peak. Great views, wild flowers, birds and very steep trails. The first morning will be spent birding along Alameda Creek and the Little Yosemite area, looking for Acorn Woodpeckers and Yellow-billed Magpies before heading to our first campsite, about 4 miles from the trailhead. The second site is just below Rose Peak; the third overlooks Lake Del Valle. The final morning we will pack the last 2 miles through a riparian area down to the lake and look for Wild Turkeys and Lawrence's Goldfinches near the reservoir. The water at each established campsite must be filtered! Pack light, but be prepared for cool evenings and warm days, poison oak, rattlesnakes and rain. We should coordinate to limit the number of stoves, water filters and bird books packed in. The first morning some cars will need to be ferried to Del Valle. Reservations necessary with a maximum of 12 people. There is a \$15 fee for camping and a \$2 fee for the Ohlone Wilderness Regional Trail Permit, which is valid for one year. Leader: Kathy Jarrett. 510.547.1233. kathy_jarrett@yahoo.com. 

PROGRAMS

Anne McTavish



The February membership programs promise to be interesting and entertaining. Please join us if you can. For more information about upcoming events or detailed directions to either program location, please see our Web page at www.goldengateaudubon.org/Chapter/programs.htm.

San Francisco

Friday, February 14

The San Francisco meetings are held at the County Fair building at the Strybing Arboretum in Golden Gate Park, 9th Ave. at Lincoln Way, San Francisco. Parking is available on the street or in the parking lot behind the building off Lincoln at 10th Ave. We meet socially at 7 p.m. Programs begin at 7:30 p.m. For details about the talk, please check our Web page.

Berkeley

The Berkeley meetings are held at the Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda, Berkeley, (between Solano and Marin). We meet socially at 7 p.m. Programs begin at 7:30 p.m.

Thursday, February 20

Robin Grossinger: "The Importance of Landscape History in Current Conservation Planning in the San Francisco Bay Area" Landscape ecologist and historian Robin Grossinger conducts

multifaceted projects of historical data retrieval, interpretation and synthesis to understand the rapid, large-scale and generally poorly documented landscape changes of the San Francisco Bay Area since European contact. Robin works with a diverse range of regional and local experts to develop shared, integrative understandings of local landscape history which inform restoration planning and design, endangered species recovery, flood and fire management, fisheries rehabilitation and natural reserve prioritization. Robin is author or co-author of a range of technical publications and has received awards in the realms of map design and local education. Please join us for an interesting and informative evening learning more about the importance and application of Landscape History. 



Robin and chicks

Good Things Can Happen: Eastshore State Park Success!

by Arthur Feinstein

In the otherwise most gloomy environmental year of 2002, there was one great shining light: the creation of the Eastshore State Park. On December 6, 2002, the California State Parks Commission voted to adopt the General Plan for the Eastshore State Park and designate it as a State Seashore, a wonderful victory for our Bay's wildlife and humans. It's hard to imagine a better outcome.

Although a state park had been assured here, it was originally going to be a State Recreation Area, and there were incredible pressures to establish most of the park as an unleashed dog site and as an area for sports activities such as soccer.

But thanks to an incredible effort from GGAS, the Sierra Club and the Citizens for the Eastshore State Park (CESP), and the willingness of the State Parks staff, led by Ruth Coleman, Acting Director of State Parks, to listen to our concerns and recognize the needs of our Bay's wildlife, the State Parks Commission adopted a General Plan that goes a long way to ensuring that wildlife will have a home for years to come on the East Bay shoreline.

The State Parks Commission designated the park as a State Seashore, an important decision since this designation gives great weight to preserving natural resource values and functions. Thus, when considering specific uses and activities at the park, State Parks staff will first look to see whether such uses will negatively impact wildlife, and

deny or revise those uses to avoid or minimize those impacts. The Commission also adopted the park's General Plan, which:

Preserves the Albany Mudflats and Emeryville Crescent as Marine Preserves.

This designation means that these areas are dedicated to wildlife with very little or no human access. Both sites are the home to some of the greatest concentrations of shorebirds in the entire Bay. Each site may have 14,000 shorebirds at one time during the fall and winter, all desperately feeding on the mudflats to recoup the energy they expended on their migratory journey from the Arctic, and fattening up for their return journey and nesting season in the spring and summer.

Preserves the Berkeley Meadows and the Albany Bulb as Conservation Areas, allowing only hiking and nature appreciation.

These areas will now continue to provide a home for many bird species that are disappearing elsewhere in the Bay Area such as White-tailed Kites, Northern Harriers, Meadowlarks, Burrowing Owls, etc.

Seeks to protect the large number of ducks that use the North Basin Lagoon

by requiring studies and mitigations before any buildings or boat launches are constructed in the area. Such mitigations may include seasonal restrictions of boating.

Many conservationists have worked hard to preserve the Albany Plateau for its wildlife values. Here one can find Meadowlarks, finches, sparrows and many other of those small brown birds



Western Meadowlark

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

that are finding it harder and harder to survive in the Bay Area. First proposed in the General Plan for active sports fields, the Plateau may yet be preserved as a natural area. The East Bay Regional Park District is proposing to buy the northern part of the North Basin Strip (the land north of the Berkeley Meadows). If the purchase is completed and the land is determined to be appropriate for soccer and other sport fields, the Eastshore State Park's General Plan then requires the Plateau to become a natural area with informal uses.

GGAS did its share to make this great event come to fruition. We knew what wildlife lived in the park and developed an understanding of the wildlife needs for which we fought. Among the many GGAS members who made great efforts we would like to recognize Lillian Fujii, Russ Wilson and Corinne Greenberg.

But we also wish to recognize the many others who made this all possible. Norman LaForce of the Sierra Club, Robert Cheasty of CESP, Sylvia McLaughlin of All the Bay and Dwight Steele of CESP (who sadly died before his great effort came to completion). We also wish to recognize all the soccer and other sports folk who were willing to work with us in finding a solution to the Albany Plateau. Thanks to all. 

GGAS Staff Changes Approved by Board

By Miles McKey, President

Your GGAS Board of Directors has approved two major changes in our chapter staffing. At the Dec. 18th meeting, the board agreed to establish a new full-time position of Conservation/Education Director, funded initially by a contribution of \$50,000 from a private donor/corporate match, and to recruit a new, full-time Executive Director.

The board has offered the Conservation/Education position to our current Executive Director, Arthur

Feinstein, with a commitment to raise additional funds to underwrite the position for a minimum of four years.

The board also approved recruitment of a new, full-time Executive Director to replace Arthur. A job description is posted on the GGAS Web site and is being advertised widely (at press time the job description was not finalized). We expect the changes to go into effect by April 2003. A major part of the job will be chapter fund-raising.

The board's decisions were based on two factors: the growth of our chapter (now the largest in California), and the major expansion of our conservation and education activities in recent years.

Arthur Feinstein has been with GGAS since 1980 and served as the chapter's part-time Executive Director for eight years. He has been managing two jobs: Executive Director and chief of our extensive conservation and education activities. GGAS conservation efforts cover a wide swath, from a legal battle to save the 1,000-acre Gateway Valley open space in Orinda to bringing back California Quail in Golden Gate Park to creating the magnificent Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline Park. Arthur has also been the leading force behind our chapter's unique and highly successful environmental education program for East Oakland and Alameda schoolchildren.

However, no one person can carry out all of these duties effectively, especially on a part-time basis. The board decided to separate the positions, using Arthur's strengths to their best advantage by naming him Conservation/Education Director. In his new role, Arthur will focus on his passion for the environment and continue his strong advocacy for protecting and restoring wetlands and wildlife. We are fortunate to have this "national hero," as he was named recently among 30 individuals honored by the Clean Water Network, an alliance of over 1,000 environmental organizations nationwide.

Speaking for the GGAS board, I believe our chapter has come to a crossroads. We must head in a new direction that will enable us to grow and achieve our great potential of effective environmental conservation and education. I believe these staffing changes are a vital first step in this direction. 

GGAS Gains Two New Board Members

By Miles McKey, President

Two new, highly qualified individuals have joined the GGAS Board of Directors, following unanimous approval by the Board at the December 18, 2002 meeting. Al Peters has agreed to serve as GGAS Treasurer, and Kevin Consey has agreed to serve as Chair of the Finance Committee.

Al Peters has 20 years of public accounting experience, including as a partner in a national Certified Public Accounting firm and more recently as chief financial officer of a Bay Area insurance firm. He retired in November 2002. A graduate of U.C. Berkeley and a longtime resident of Piedmont, Al served for eight years, until 2002, on the Piedmont City Council, including two years as Mayor. He also has volunteered as treasurer of a number of

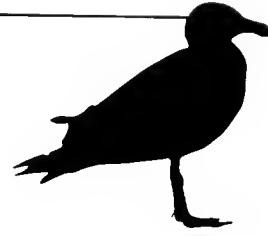
Bay Area nonprofit organizations. In addition to his financial acumen, Al has a strong interest in ecology and is a frequent hiker.

Kevin Consey is the director of the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive. He has an undergraduate degree in art history, a Master of Arts from the University of Michigan and a Master's in Business Administration from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University. Kevin held executive positions at several art museums before joining the Berkeley Art Museum. In his spare time, he offers financial planning consulting to non-profit organizations. He is a member of GGAS and an avid birder.

Welcome Al and Kevin! 

BACKYARD BIRDER

Meg Pauletich



You probably haven't given much thought to birds' tongues, but their diversity is another example of the evolution of a body part that maximizes its uses. Upon rescuing a Nuttall's Woodpecker from an attacking Scrub Jay, I attempted to remove a feather from its tongue and was startled and amazed at its length as it unfurled. The stickiness and the barbs of the tongue held the feather firmly as it unraveled. This piqued my curiosity about birds' tongues.

Humans have fleshy tongues that are used for tasting, swallowing and speaking. Our tongues are attached to a single hyoid (U-shaped) bone. Bird tongues are usually tough, rather cartilaginous and the hyoid consists of a series of small narrow pairs of bones. Bird tongues come in a huge variety of shapes and sizes, generally fitting the size and shape of the bird's bill. Some birds have a mere vestige (pelicans, cormorants, ibises and storks). Others, such as parrots, ducks, some finches and flamingos, have quite large and fleshy tongues.

Birds in general don't have much of a sense of taste. Rabbits have about 17,000 taste buds; humans have around 9,000; a domestic pigeon has 27 to 59 and a baby chick has 8 (wonder who counted them?). So birds' tongues are mainly used as tactile sensors and as an aide in swallowing.

Some fish-eating birds (mergansers and penguins, for example, but not kingfishers) have well-developed tongues with backward-pointing barbs

that aid in holding slippery fish. The serrated edges of ducks' tongues are used as a sieve. Sap-sucking woodpeckers have a brush at the tip which soaks up the liquid by capillary action. Serrations on the edges of the tongues of geese are used to hold and break off vegetation. Many finches and parrots use their large tongues to manipulate seeds or fruit as they husk their food.



Northern Flicker

extend from near the base of the tongue around the back of the skull and attach near the nostrils. Flickers, who adore ants, have one of the longest tongues. With the aid of backward-projecting barbs and sticky saliva, they can probe deep within the earth or tree holes to locate insect prey and extract meals with ease.

In days of yore, hummingbirds were thought to sip nectar as through a straw. Curious scientists discovered instead that their tiny tongues are similar to woodpeckers—long and extensible. In addition, they are deeply split at the tip, are bilaterally grooved and can be furled into a tube. After liquid and occasional insects are drawn into the bill the hummers swallow in the usual way. Fringes on their tongue tips also help them glean insects from vegetation.

It is simply not known if the tongues of birds who mimic or "talk" (such as parrots, crows, thrashers and parakeets) are used to aid in their "speech." Maybe someone is studying the subject as you read this! Meanwhile, we can be impressed by the adaptations Mother Nature has come up with in so far as tongues are concerned.

Correction

In the January 2003 issue of the *Gull*, the Tody-Flycatcher drawn by Dana Gardner was incorrectly titled. Our thanks again to Dana for the use of his work. The Gull regrets the error.

The Importance of the Alameda Wildlife Refuge

Why did the USFWS initially decide to create the refuge? One reason is that the Alameda site hosts the world's most important nesting colony of the endangered California Least Tern. The Least Tern traditionally nested on California's beaches from April to September, migrating south in the winter. As our beaches became human recreational centers, the Least Tern population declined drastically, and became one of the first species listed as endangered. The Terns now have very few nesting sites; the refuge is one of them.

Here the Terns have found the densest fish populations in the estuary. As a result, the Tern colony has thrived and grown significantly since the Navy left, and in 2002 produced between 30 and 50 percent of all of the new Least Tern fledglings in existence.

The proposed refuge also hosts San Francisco Bay's only night-roosting site for the endangered California Brown Pelican. Last year over 2,000 pelicans at one time were seen on the breakwater. Over 100 other species of birds inhabit the refuge site, including large numbers of raptors.

The proposed refuge, located in the middle of one of the densest urban centers in the nation, is an ideal location for bringing people close to nature, particularly low-income communities in the East Bay who otherwise might not have the opportunity to enjoy this experience.



Let Your Voice Be Heard

Please write to Craig Manson, Assistant Secretary of the Interior in Washington D.C. Ask him to reject the proposal to transfer the Alameda National Wildlife Refuge site to RRGF and instead have the Navy immediately transfer those parts of the Alameda site free of contaminants to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and formally establish the Alameda National Wildlife Refuge.

Craig Manson, Assistant Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street N.W., Room 3160, Washington, DC 20240

Also, please call or write your U.S. Senators and your Congress Representative with the same request. If you write, consider faxing your letter. After the anthrax scare, mail is very slow getting to elected officials in Washington, D.C.

Senator Barbara Boxer
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
202.224.3553
415.956.6701 fax
<http://boxer.senate.gov/contact>

Senator Dianne Feinstein
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
202.224.3841
202.228.3954 fax
<http://feinstein.senate.gov/email.html>

Congressperson _____
U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515
www.house.gov/writerep

If you wish to telephone, the Capitol Switchboard will connect you to your Congressperson. Simply call 202.224.3121.

Letters from everyone to Representative Nancy Pelosi would be very helpful. Part of the Alameda National Wildlife Refuge lands falls within the boundaries of San Francisco, and thus the Refuge is in Congresswoman Pelosi's District.

Alameda Wildlife Refuge Threatened, *continued from front page*

We believe that the most appropriate use of the Alameda site is to be managed as a National Wildlife Refuge. This will ensure that the site's fragile habitats and the endangered species dependent upon them will be appropriately managed forever.

The Navy cannot carry out its new transfer plan if the USFWS doesn't want it to happen. The USFWS must first retract its own request for the Refuge before the Navy can transfer

it to RRGF or another nonprofit. Alarmingly, we have heard that the USFWS is actively considering agreeing to this deal.

The future of the California Least Tern depends on us. Please write to your Senators, Congressperson and the Assistant Secretary of the Interior. All the information you need is in the box above. If you have any questions please feel free to call Arthur Feinstein at the GGAS office at 510.843.6551.



Donations

Thank you for your generous response to our year-end fundraising appeal!

Golden Eagle (\$1000 and more)

Miles & Mel McKay

Peregrine Falcon (\$500 to \$1000)

Anonymous (Gateway), Bob Bennett, Ron & Susan Briggs (Least Terns-with matching 2:1 grant from The Flora Family Foundation)

Least Tern (\$200 to \$500)

Community of Canyon – Yoga Group, Margaret Deane, Frank & Janice Delfino (FAWR), Raj & Helen Desai, Dave Earp & Louise Abbott, Richard Mlynarik & Elizabeth Willey, Mike & Ann Richter, Frank Silver, Susan Thorner, Joanne Sarg Wallin, Gail Williams

Clapper Rail (\$100 to \$200)

David & Annie Armstrong, Bob Bennett (dog/park policy), Mary Betlach, Robert & Marion Blumberg, Nancy Breslin (in name of John Austin & Jacqui Smalley), Melissa & Richard Bruins, James W. Clarke, Ms. Barbara F. Dengler, Barry Deutsch, Judith Dunham, Donna Lee Elvidge, Joe Ferrie & Madhu Prasher*, Mary & Tom Foote, Robert C. Friese, Dorothy D. Gregor, Dr. & Mrs. Moses Grossman, Bill & Judy Hein, Else Jensen, Frances L. Johnston, Lizabeth G. Kaska, Steven Lanum (with matching 2:1 donation from Charles Schwab Corp.), Jane & Michael Larkin, Leslie Lethridge, Mrs. James K. McWilliams, Steven & Renee Margolin, Michael & Susan Meadows, Mark Mushkat, John S. Nelson, Robert & Dorothy O'Brien, Andrea & Richard E. O'Leary, Kevin H. Owen, Regina Phelps, Jay Pierrepont, Edwin Pike, Kathleen Ramos, Russell Rector, Phila Witherell Rogers, Carla Rugeroni, Sylvia Sabel, Leonard Schwab & Rita Brenner, L.M. Seiler (in name of J.J. Seiler), Jan Smith, Elizabeth Sojourner, William C. Springer, Stephen R. Steinke, Ann Stone, George & Helene Strauss, John & Louise Sutter, Anna Wilcox

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In Memoriam

Arlene Coggburn – Marilyn Davis, teachers of Jefferson Elementary School in Berkeley (Wendy W.Y. Fong, Sarah Lorch Goldstein, James Harris, John E. Poole), and Toy-Go-Round, Inc.

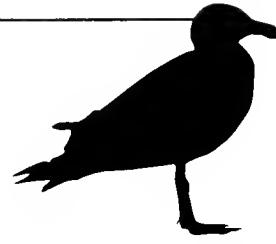
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OBSERVATIONS

December 1–31, 2002
Jay Withgott



The latter half of December saw storms, storms, storms. Wind and rain region-wide for much of the month alleviated our landscape's thirst for precipitation, but made for poor Christmas Bird Count weather. Many CBCs reported totals far below average due to inclement weather. And the tempests brought in few out-of-place birds to make up for it. One prominent exception was Red Phalaropes, which graced many inland bodies of water in the wake of the storms. The state's 7th Sedge Wren, North America's first Canada Warbler to linger into January, and an odd Varied Thrush were other highlights, and early indications were that we may be in for a repeat of last year's strange winter-time Barn Swallow invasion.

Loons to Ducks

Several Pacific Loons were inland in SCL locations, and Red-necked Crebes attracted notice in San Francisco's Marina District from 27 Dec. on (DA; mob), at Calero Res., SCL, from the 13th on (JD; oob), and at Linda Mar, SM, 31 Dec. (JRB).

Northern Fulmars were the most-reported tubenose from coastal locations this month, the stormy weather bringing in perhaps slightly more than usual to MRN and SM, including a count of 3,000 off McClure's Beach, PRNS, 14 Dec. Other tubenoses at PRNS that day were 3 Black-vented, 1 Pink-footed, and 1 Sooty/Short-tailed Shearwater. A Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel seen from shore from Pigeon Pt., SM, on 29 Dec. (RT).

A Brown Pelican wandered inland to Clifton Court Forebay, ALA, on the 21st (AEd; KR, NC). And as happens most

winters, small numbers of Ross's, Snow, and White-fronted Geese took up residence in several Bay-Area locations.

Single Tufted Ducks were recorded at L. Merritt, ALA, on the 8th (LT), Redwood Shores (ADM) and Foster City (SMi), SM, 14 Dec., and Bolinas Lagoon, MRN, 27 Dec. (JiWh). November's Long-tailed Duck at Princeton Harbor, SM, continued through at least 14 Dec., while another was seen flying past Pigeon Pt., SM, on



Brown Pelican

Raptors to Alcids

Raptor reports included the usual smattering of Ferruginous Hawks, Rough-legged Hawks, Prairie Falcons, and Bald Eagles, especially in Solano Co., where a dark-morph Swainson's Hawk was also noted, near Flannery and Robinson Rds. on 1 Dec. (KB, CW). Another Swainson's was in e. CC on the 21st (CBC, SG). A rare pale morph of "Harlan's Hawk" was seen 29 Dec. in Montara, SM (AJ).

The Robinson Rd., SOL, area is known for being the Bay Area's most reliable location for Mountain Plover, and this winter they were back, with a high counts ranging from 150-200. The Pacific Golden-Plover at the Stevens Cr. mouth, SCL, remained throughout the month (mob), and Red Knots also frequented this area, topping out at 124 on the 11th (MR). Red Phalaropes blown inland by stormy weather were noted on lakes from the 16th through the 29th, in MRN, SCL, SF, and SM; in total, at least 185 individuals were reported.

A gull flying by the Cliff House, SF, at close range on the 14th was reported as a Kumlien's Gull (BF). The observer provided a description and had viewed several Thayer's Gulls earlier, for comparison. A Claucous Gull was reported from Half Moon Bay, SM, on the 8th (RT), another from Linda Mar, SM, on the 31st (JRB), and on the 29th a first-year gull was discovered at GCP, SF (MZ) that caused much discussion among area larophiles. The strikingly white bird certainly had many Claucous genes, but may well be the result of an interspecific rendezvous. The photos and ongoing discussion are serving as a good lesson in how tricky this particular identification challenge can be.

A late Caspian Tern was noted, 4 Dec., from Foster City, SM (ADM). Alcid reports were few, including Ancient Murrelet at Pigeon Pt., SM, on the 22nd, and a Cassin's Auklet inside Princeton Harbor, SM, on the 14th (RT).

Doves to Thrashers

Short-eared Owls were reported in ones and twos here and there from throughout our region, a Long-eared Owl from the Concord Naval Weapons Station on the 14th (CBC, SG), and Saw-whet Owls from SM and NAP (JR, KO, BL, DQ).

A Red-naped Sapsucker was found at L. Solano Co. Park, SOL, on 8 Dec. (RSe), staying through at least the 15th. By the 22nd, however, its favored tree was being monopolized by an apparent hybrid Red-breasted x Red-naped. A Pileated Woodpecker was also frequenting the park early in Dec., and the nominate-race Red-breasted Sapsucker in GGP, SF, remained through the month.

The only flyatecher reports in this cold month were an Eastern Phoebe near Bolinas, MRN, on the 30th (TG), and a Tropicel Kingbird in Colma, SM, on the 27th (RB).

As occurred last year, an odd influx of swallows, particuarly Barn Swallows, appeared to be beginning as of the end of December. Some Trees and Violet-greens are expeeted in winter, especiaially in SCL, but at least 10 Barn Swallows were reported from SCL, SF, and SM in the late days of the month, and 3 Cliff (SF, 27 Dec., SR, SA), and 1 probable Rough-winged (SF, 27 Dec., LC, JRB, HM) were also seen.

The avian star of the month was the Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*) that showed up at Half Moon Bay SB, SM, and remained for the rest of the month. First found on 7 Dec. (PM), this little skulker tested the patience of many a birder as it remained hidden in the dune scrub for all but a few minutes each day, with only its ehip note revealing its presence. Patience paid off for many, though, as the bird would occasionally perch in the open and provide excellent views. It is only the 7th record of this speeies for California.

Another one of the month's most interesting sightings was not a rare species,

Wood Warbler Sightings

Tennessee Warbler

14 Dec. El Granada, SM RT

Nashville Warbler

17 Dec. Half Moon Bay, SM RT

27 Dec. Ft. Mason, SF DA, oob

30 Dec. San Fran. Zoo, SF DM

Palm Warbler

6 birds all in SM mob

Black-and-white Warbler

15 Dec. Berkeley CBC

Canada Warbler

27-31 Dec. San Fran. Zoo AH, DM; mob

Abbreviations for Observers: DA, David Armstrong; SA, Stephanie Arthur; JRB, J.R. Blair; KB, Ken Burton; RB, Russell Bright; BC, Barbara Cosse; JC, Josiah Clark; LC, Luke Cole; LCh, Les Chibana; NC, Nancy Christensen; SC, Sue Cossins; ADM, Al DeMartini; JD, Jim Danzenbaker; AE, Al Eisner; AEd,

Art Edwards; BF, Brian Fitch; RF, Rich Fernck; SG, Steve Glover, TG, Tom Gardai; AH, Ann Hughes; AJ, Alvaro Jaramillo; JK, Jon King, PK, Pat Kenny, RK, Roland Kenner; BL, Bob Lewis, RL, Rick Lebadour; DM, Dan Murphy, HM, Helen McKinley; KM, Kevin McKereghan; PM, Peter Metropulos; SM, Steve Miller; DN, Dan Nelson; KO, Kris Olson; MP, Mike Parmeter; MPx, Mark Paxton; DQ, Dave Quady, JR, Jennifer Rycenga, KR, Kathy Robertson; MR, Michael Rogers; SR, Siobhan Ruck; RSe, Roberta Seals; LT, Linda Terrill; RT, Ronald S. Thorn, FV, Frank Vanslager; CW, Connie Williams; DW, David Wimpfheimer; JiWh, Jim White; MZ, Matt Zlatunich.

Semicolons separate original observer(s) from subsequent observer(s). Abbreviation "mob" = many observers; "oob" = other observers. Information is compiled from BirdBox transcripts and regional listservs; the author apologizes for any errors or omissions.

Abbreviations for Counties and Others: ALA, Alameda; CBC, Christmas Bird Count; CC, Contra Costa; Cr., Creek; GGP, Golden Gate Park; L., Lake; MRN, Marin; PRNS, Pt. Reyes National Seashore; SCL, Santa Clara; SF, San Francisco; SM, San Mateo; SOL, Solano; SON, Sonoma; SB, State Beach.

but a rare eolor variant. On 21 Dec. at GGP, SF, a Varied Thrush lacking any orange eolor was found (KM). This bird was white where it should have been orange, and the breast band and upperparts were a cool gray. Although a similar bird had been seen only weeks before in Santa Cruz Co., there are only 2 mu-seum speimens from California and very few sightings. Oddly enough, the single British reecord for Varied Thrush (in 1982) was of this color variant. One Saeramento observer (JK) who saw that bird remarked, "It is ironic that this plumage of Varied Thrush has probably been seen by many more British birders than Amerieans."

On 12 Dec., a resident of Moss Beaeh, SM, noticed a strange bird in her yard and later heard it smack into her window. It eventually recovered and flew off, and she soon identified it as a Gray Catbird (BC). On Patterson Pass Rd., ALA, 21 Dec., 10 Mountain Bluebirds were seen (AEd).

Wood Warblers to Finches

Among the handful of warblers this

month, especially notable was a Canada Warbler found at the San Francisco Zoo on the CBC, 27 Dec. (AH, DM). There are only a handful of records in North America for stragglers into December, and no over-wintering reecords of this species. In addition to the warblers in the box, there were 2 Yellow Warblers (SCL, SM); 4 Black-throated Gray Warblers (ALA, SCL), and 5 Hermit Warblers (SCL, SF).

A very late Western Tanager was found 7 Dec. at Strybing Arboretum, GGP, SF (RF). Single Chipping Sparrows were highlights for CBCs both on the 15th at Hidden L. Park, Martinez, CC (SG), and the next day at Palo Alto (AE). Five Swamp Sparrows were reported from CC, SF, and SM.

One, then 2, Lapland Longspurs were at Bodega Head, SON, 3-4 Dec. (MP, DN, RL). And we end with two excellent December yard birds: A young male Rose-breasted Grosbeak visited a Burlingame, SM, feeder on 22-23 Dec. (SC), while on 28-29 Dec. an Indigo Bunting visited a feeder in Montara, SM (AJ).

Peregrine Falcon Survey Planned

Glenn Stewart, UC Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group

In an effort to quantify the level of recovery of the peregrine falcon population in California and renew baseline studies on an annual, state-wide basis, the U.C. Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group (SCPBRG) plans a survey for spring 2003. We need the help of people who know of peregrine nest sites, and who are willing to make at least two visits to the sites this spring.

The recovery of the peregrine falcon population in North America after the curtailment of DDT use has been called the most successful wildlife conservation project in history. In 1964 no peregrines were known to remain east of the Mississippi River. A 1970 survey of

California revealed just two nesting pairs. We estimate there are more than 250 breeding pairs of peregrine falcons in California today, but no comprehensive survey has happened since 1992. Since the breeding season is approximately 100 days long, and peregrines often nest in very remote areas, we need help from those who know of, or suspect, peregrine breeding activity in their area. If you wish to report a site known to you, or even better, wish to commit to observing the site, please contact us. All nest territory locations will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact us at falconet@cats.ucsc.edu to express your interest and to describe the site you wish to observe. Then visit



Nesting peregrine falcons

www.scpbrg.org and click on the “Peregrine Survey” button for survey protocol, guidelines, detailed descriptions of peregrine behavior and vocalizations, and a survey form to print, complete and return.

The U.C. Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group is a nonprofit organization supported by contracts, grants and gifts. Your financial support mailed to SCPBRG, 100 Shaffer Rd., Santa Cruz 95060, allows us to do more. 

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